

## 17 What is the Relationship between Creation and Salvation?<sup>1</sup>

There is a wide divergence between the treatment of God, humanity, and the world generally characteristic of the First Testament's narrative and prophetic traditions and that which characterizes Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. The former assume that God and God's purpose were known especially to Israel in the course of a particular series of historical events through which that purpose (in which Israel as God's special people had a key place) was put into effect. Motifs such as exodus, covenant, and prophecy are central here. In contrast, the poetic books refer rarely to specific historical events, to an unfolding purpose, or to a particular people; indeed, outside some Psalms they do not do so at all. They concentrate more on the world and on everyday life than on history, more on the regular than on the once-for-all, more on individuals (though not outside their social relationships) than on the nation, more on personal insight and experience than on sacred tradition. How may these two approaches interrelate theologically?

### 1 Salvation-history Emphasized and Subjected to Critique

The former of those two sets of emphases has often been described as the salvation-history approach. During the middle third of the twentieth century it was overemphasized, and the theological significance of the approach that focuses on God's involvement in the regularities of life was neglected. More recently, interest in the latter has in, while the emphasis on salvation-history has been subject to a wide-ranging critique. Its reference is ambiguous; was it really salvation that Israel found in history, and was it really history that brought Israel salvation? Its importance had been overstated; it could not provide the comprehensive framework for understanding the First Testament that had been attributed to it, and even the salvation events themselves could not reveal God's purpose without the word of interpretation that explained their meaning. Its basis seemed uncertain; both tradition historians and theologians questioned whether the events of salvation-history had actually happened. Its relevance no longer seemed self-evident; what meaning attaches today to the claim that God is "the God who acts"? Its uniqueness (compared with other religions) was questioned: did not all nations, after all, believe that their gods were active in their history?<sup>2</sup>

To say "goodbye to *Heilsgeschichte*"<sup>3</sup> would be an overreaction. While not omnipresent, the salvation-history approach outlined above is very

<sup>1</sup> First published in a more extensive form (especially in §1 and 2) as "A Unifying Approach to 'Creation' and 'Salvation' in the Old Testament," in *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), pp.200-39.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), pp. 13-87, 223-39; Antonius H. J. Gunneweg, *Understanding the Old Testament* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), pp. 173-217, and their references.

<sup>3</sup> See Franz Hesse, *Abschied von der Heilsgeschichte* (Zürich: EVZ, 1971).

prominent in the Bible. The first half of each Testament comprises narrative works that, while pre-critical rather than modern history, offer a series of connected interpretations of events of the past that were regarded as significant for the time of their writers; they assume that certain historical events in the life of one people were of key significance for the unveiling and effecting of the ultimate saving purpose of God. The same assumption is explicit in most of the non-narrative works (the prophets and the epistles) that follow; and it is not absent from some of the other remaining books (e.g., Psalms, Revelation).

The emphasis on salvation-history drew attention to the fact that First Testament and New Testament faith is not characteristically a system of abstract truths but a message related to certain concrete events. The events become meaningful only as they are understood within a context of interpretation, or are accompanied by words of interpretation, but the "propositional" truth itself is characteristically expressed in the form of comments on historical events.

It is expressed, in fact, as a story. It is not a story like a children's tale or a western, which gives fictional embodiment to what we hope life is like (the good guys win in the end). It is an interpretation, but an interpretation of factual events: these things come to pass so that you will know that Yahweh is God; if Christ is not raised, then our faith is vain. The story is valid only if the events it relates actually took place. Thus, even though talk of "the God who acts" may now raise problems, this way of speaking is too prominent in the Bible for it to be sidestepped in biblical study. Indeed, while this way of speaking can be paralleled elsewhere, no other people's literature gives the central place to their gods' involvement in their history that the Bible does. The religions of the Middle East, Gnosticism in the Hellenistic period, existentialism and other philosophies in the contemporary world, have all offered worldviews that did not give prominence to once-for-all historical events; they thus contrast with the Bible's perspective.

Nevertheless, the notion of salvation-history was long used uncritically in theological study, and allowed to overshadow other biblical themes.

## 2 Nature, Blessing, and Wisdom Overshadowed and Re-acknowledged

*Nature* as a realm in which God was involved was underplayed in the classic mid-twentieth-century works on First Testament theology by Walther Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad. Various reasons may underlie this neglect. "Nature" as a self-contained structure with inherent creative power is hardly a First Testament idea; in First Testament thinking, the unity and dynamic of "natural" phenomena derive from their dependence on Yahweh. Second, when the First Testament does refer to Yahweh's lordship over the natural realm, it generally links this lordship with the theme of redemption (so, e.g., Genesis; Amos; Isa 40 – 55; and such Psalms as 33; 74; 89; 136; 148). Even Hosea and Deuteronomy, where the question of lordship in nature is a point at issue, do not appeal to Yahweh's creative activity in isolation from Yahweh's redemptive activity. Appeal to nature in isolation from history

may be reckoned historically late and theologically secondary. Third, the alien character of such a religious interest in nature may be of theological significance. It was the "nature religions" that focused on it, and Hosea's polemic reveals where such an interest leads. Authentically First Testament faith historicized the farmer's instinctive involvement with the cycle of nature, subordinating the agricultural significance of the farmer's festivals to a relationship with the salvation events whereby Israel came into possession of the land, and thus encouraging in them a faith absolutely different from that of Canaanite religion.<sup>4</sup>

The German-speaking theology of the Eichrodt-von Rad era was also encouraged to emphasize the negative aspect to a religious interest in nature by seeing the faith of the "German Christians" as a nature religion from which theologians who identified with the Confessing Church dissociated themselves in stressing the particularity of what God did with the Jews.<sup>5</sup> Embarrassment with the clash between Gen 1 and Darwinian science perhaps also encouraged the focusing of attention on other aspects of the First Testament, though if so the clash between the First Testament's view of history (or the role attributed to history by First Testament theological study) and the critical historian's view of First Testament history now provokes at least equal embarrassment.

Even before the ecological awareness of the 1960s some scholars who affirmed the primary significance of salvation-history wrote as if they partially recognized the imbalance of this emphasis.<sup>6</sup> After all, Israelites had to reflect on Yahweh's relationship to nature, because they came to be involved with land and agriculture and had to face the question whether Yahweh was the source of fertility for them, not least in light of their contemporaries' convictions regarding the link between their gods and nature. This is part of the significance of Gen 1 - 2, as well as of Hosea, Deuteronomy, and Psalms such as 47; 65; 67; 93; 96 - 99.<sup>7</sup> While asserting that Yahweh was lord of the material world and the source of its life, Israel recognized that this world is a unity characterized by recurrence and regularity, with a life of its own, and although this is not a view of nature as a system possessing an inherent dynamic, it is a view of nature;<sup>8</sup> it is both interesting to compare with the Western metaphysical view of nature that underlies the use of metaphor from nature in poetry, and instructive for our formulating an attitude toward God and natural resources.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For these reasons, see, e.g., Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd/New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 131-43, 152; *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd/New York: Harper, 1962 and 1965) 1:136-39, 426, 2:103-4; H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford/New York: OUP, 1946), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Norman Young, *Creator, Creation and Faith* (London: Collins/Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp. 17-20.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the references to von Rad above.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Walter Harrelson, *From Fertility Cult to Worship* (Reprinted Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 12-18; John W. Rogerson, "The Old Testament View of Nature," in *Instruction and Interpretation* (OtSt 20, 1977): 67-84.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the OT*, pp. 1-48 (with his references esp. to Genesis and Job); Rogerson, "The OT View of Nature," pp. 69-73.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Brian Wicker, *The Story-Shaped World* (London: Athlone/Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1975), pp. 1-8, 50-70; J. Gerald Janzen, "Modes of Power and Divine

Some of the First Testament's own interest in nature (notably in Proverbs and the Song of Songs) has a practical concern, with learning from it about human life, but elsewhere its joy in the specifics and in the total wonder of nature seems less pragmatic (e.g., Pss 145; 147). Both in its order and in its wonder creation reflects something of its creator, declares the creator's glory (Pss 19; 24; Isa 6:4), and fulfills the creator's will, even when becoming a means of chastisement and not just of blessing for human beings (Gen 3; Deut 28; Joel 3:3-4 [2:30-31]). It thus shares life with humanity, yet it enjoys God's blessing independently of human beings and can be set over against them. The fullest First Testament review of nature in its mysterious detail, in Job 38 - 39, is given neither to explain everything to him nor (ultimately) to confound him, but to reassure him that the mystery of God that lies behind the mystery of nature is one that can be accepted as nature itself can be.<sup>10</sup>

Israel's "reticence about creation in her early traditions"<sup>11</sup> should not be exaggerated.

*Blessing* is a motif that suggests God's involvement in the regular and the everyday affairs of birth and death, marriage and the family, work and society, which are essential to human life. To concentrate exclusively on the once-for-all acts whereby God effects a purpose in history also involves neglecting God's involvement in these everyday affairs. Salvation is treated as effectively coextensive with acts of deliverance, and the theme of blessing in everyday life is missed.<sup>12</sup> The overshadowing of this theme appears also in the longstanding neglect of the Song of Songs' overt concern with sexual love. It is still illustrated in Barth's extensive treatment, where the Song is seen as written on the basis of the nature of God's love for Israel; the covenant between Yahweh and Israel is the original of which the relationship between men and women is a copy.<sup>13</sup>

As is the case with the theme of nature, even the apologetic concern that has emphasized the First Testament's interest in history (because it has seen the cutting edge of the First Testament's significance for our own day to lie here) ought to be motivated also to emphasize the First Testament's interest in blessing, with its concern for concrete personal experience and feelings; Yahwism must have a relevance to everyday human life.<sup>14</sup> Yahweh is involved in the contingencies of the individual's personal history as well as in those of the history of the nations, involved in the blessings of life itself, of fertility, success, happiness, good health, prosperity, honor, and of peace in the community, of all the good that comes from having Yahweh with you. This is illustrated by the stories of people such as Ruth, Saul, and David, but (again like the theme of nature) it becomes a focus in the Psalms and Job. In the praise and lament of the Psalms all the positive and negative experiences of everyday life are treated as part of people's relationship with

---

Relativity," *Encounter* (Indianapolis) 36 (1975): 379-406 (p. 385).

<sup>10</sup> Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the OT*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>11</sup> Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos* (New York: Association, 1967), p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> See especially Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), pp. 15-17.

<sup>13</sup> *Church Dogmatics* iii/1 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958), pp. 311-29.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Janzen, "Modes of Power and Divine Relativity," p. 385.

Yahweh,<sup>15</sup> while Job focuses on the experience of calamity in everyday life, of blessing becoming curse. Of the narrative works, Genesis has most to say about blessing. The concrete blessings given to all humanity and the struggle between blessing and curse are a key motif in Gen 1 – 11, while Gen 12 – 50 is structured by the theme of blessing promised, sought after, imperiled, sacrificed, bought and sold, fought over, but always vouchsafed and, at least in part, actually experienced. Blessing is also a central theme in Deuteronomy, where it is set before Israel as a prospect to enjoy in the promised land (e.g., Deut 7:13-14; 28:3-6; 30:19); it is prominent in the prophets' vision of a future state of salvation;<sup>16</sup> and it is the gift that God gives people in Christ.<sup>17</sup>

*Wisdom* is both the way to blessing and the embodiment of blessing. In Proverbs and Job, the person of insight is the one who can see how to live the blessed life: how to find peace, prosperity, success, and happiness. The blessed person is then the one who can give wise counsel and formulate a wise purpose.<sup>18</sup>

The wisdom writings are the books of the First Testament most like parallel writings of other peoples, and their understanding of God and humanity reflects the common theology of Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Egypt. This is one reason for the overshadowing of wisdom by history and prophecy. Indeed, God might seem to be really dispensable from wisdom's understanding of reality. Wisdom is an essentially secular, humanity-centered, non-authoritarian, self-sufficient, pragmatic approach to life, picturing events working out in accordance with cause-effect forces built into them. Proverbs itself is committed to taking Yahweh into account (e.g., Prov 16:1, 9; 21:30-31), but the prophets are as rude about Israel's wise as they are about the wise of other peoples (see Isa 19:11-13; 29:14; 31:1-3). The occupational hazard of the wise is to walk by calculation rather than by faith.<sup>19</sup>

But the wisdom writings reveal that their resources do not quite enable them to answer the questions they ask. Proverbs itself acknowledges that facts must always be preferred to theories; even though it is concerned to wrest order from the chaos of experience, such order cannot be forced to emerge when it is not really present. Job's friends have to ignore Proverbs' nuances and qualifications in order to generate the dogmatic confidence of wise men who think they know everything (also derided by Ecclesiastes). The Book of Job avoids skepticism by working toward an unexpected climax, a theophany, a special revelation, without which the story of Job would come to a stop rather than an end. This event brings no new data for the resolution of the book's theological question, but it brings Job to a trustful submission to Yahweh through the experience of being personally confronted by Yahweh. Such a device, however, has no place in a true

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Claus Westermann, *What Does the Old Testament Say about God?* (London: SPCK/Atlanta: Knox, 1979), pp. 69, 71.

<sup>16</sup> See Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church*, pp. 8-11, 33-34, 63-64, 81.

<sup>17</sup> See Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church*, pp. 24-26, 64-101.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church*, pp. 37-40.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., William McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* (London: SCM/Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1965).

wisdom book; theophany is a distinctly non-rational, non-generalizable, non-everyday phenomenon. So the book solves the problem it examines only by looking outside the wisdom tradition, and it does not offer an intellectual solution to the intellectual problem of theodicy, but a religious solution to the religious problem of how one relates to God.<sup>20</sup>

Ecclesiastes has a more negative final atmosphere than Job, because the author refuses to introduce what he might call a *deus ex machina*. Ecclesiastes is Job without the theophany. The author is both more rigorous in (and earns more admiration for) his unremitting insistence on a verifiable worldview, and in the end more wrong (if taken as the whole truth). Ecclesiastes takes the wisdom approach to its logical conclusion and proves this to be a dead end. He too shows that there is no escape from theological impasse within the wisdom tradition itself.<sup>21</sup> Wisdom records "an unfinished and even unfinishable dialogue about man and world";<sup>22</sup> it can only operate on the basis of an epistemological consensus and with the assumption of an order brought into creation at the beginning, and cannot deal with a recurrent threat to that order or with a questioning of that consensus.<sup>23</sup>

Renewed interest in Wisdom in the last decades of the twentieth century was encouraged by factors in theology and society. The wisdom tradition is decidedly world-affirming in its attitude to life and learning, and such features that had seemed shortcomings now became assets.

### 3 The Polarity of God's Involvement in the Regularities of Life (Creation) and God's Acts of Deliverance (Redemption)

The First Testament embraces both the theme of God's acts of deliverance in the history of Israel, and God's involvement in the regularities of life that makes it possible for the natural world to be a place of blessing if it is approached in wisdom. How do these two themes relate to each other?

W. Zimmerli observed that "wisdom thinks resolutely within the framework of a theology of creation."<sup>24</sup> The comment is an exaggeration, but a theology of creation, which emphasizes God's ongoing involvement in the regularities of the world that God created and maintains in existence, does underlie wisdom, as it underlies an emphasis on God's blessing in everyday experience and an emphasis on God's involvement in nature. This suggests that we may speak of the two themes we are considering in terms of the theological expressions creation and redemption. One or other of these themes is commonly seen as ultimately more significant than the

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. Coert Rylaarsdam, *Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature* (reprinted Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976), pp. 74-90.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. James L. Crenshaw, "Popular Questioning of the Justice of God in Ancient Israel," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82 (1970): 380-95 (pp. 389-90).

<sup>22</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon/London: SCM, 1972), p. 318.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," in John G. Gammie and others (ed.), *Israelite Wisdom* (S. Terrien Festschrift; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1978), pp. 43-57 (pp. 47-54), and Walter Brueggemann, "The Epistemological Crisis of Israel's Two Histories," in the same volume, pp. 85-105 (p. 86).

<sup>24</sup> "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," *SJT* 17 (1964): 16-58 (p. 148).

other. More likely the relationship between them is thoroughly dialectical. The First Testament itself both interconnects them (in the Hexateuch) and sets them side by side (if one considers the broad sweep of the narrative books and that of the poetic books over against each other), without clearly making one subordinate to the other. It speaks both of God's everyday involvement in the ongoing life of nature and cosmos, of nation and individual, with the insights that emerge from an empirical study of these realities, and of God's once-for-all acts of deliverance on behalf of the particular people Israel, with the specific insights given in association with those acts, and raises the question for us how we may correlate them without subordinating one to the other.

Both seek to bring order (continuity, generalization) to the specific and concrete, or to allow such order to emerge from it. Both presuppose a trust in Yahweh as one whose actions are an embodiment of wisdom, ordered, not random, yet free, a trust based on experience of God's ways. Both require insight as well as trust; an openness to a secular way of looking at events and their interconnections as well as a sensitivity to God's activity. Both contrast with myth in offering paradigms of the relative, changing, temporal nature of all human experience. Wisdom and other ways of thinking that link with the creation trajectory develop in history and find links with history in the person of Solomon and in the ministry of prophets such as Amos and Isaiah; historical thinking depends on assumptions about God's regular activity and is actually put into writing by "wise men."<sup>25</sup>

Creation and redemption are not to be set in too sharp a disjunction. But neither are God's universal involvement in life's regularities and God's particular redemptive acts in Israel's history simply to be assimilated to each other. Although the First Testament can see redemption as an act of creation, it does not systematically integrate statements about creation into the acting of God in history, and it does not see creation itself as an act of liberation in the way other peoples did.<sup>26</sup> The polarity we are concerned with is not to be dissolved by subordinating one pole to the other, or by assimilating the two poles. Our concern is to tease out the various ways in which the two poles relate to each other, preserving the tension between them. I shall consider four facets of the relationship between creation and redemption that emerge from the First Testament material.

#### 4 The World God Redeems is the World of God's Creation

The two ideas, creation and redemption, correspond to two aspects of our position in the world. Although the First Testament sometimes relates these to each other as a chronological sequence (humanity was first created,

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., John J. Collins, "The 'Historical' Nature of the Old Testament in Recent Biblical Theology," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979): 185-204; John L. McKenzie, "Reflections on Wisdom," *JBL* 86 (1967):1-9; Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, "Weisheit und Geschichte," in Hans Walter Wolff (ed.), *Probleme biblischer Theologie* (G. von Rad Festschrift; Munich: Kaiser, 1971), pp. 136-54.

<sup>26</sup> As Burton Cooper notes ("How Does God Act in Our Time?" *USQR* 32 [1976-77]: 25-35), this raises problems for liberation theology's approach to creation as expressed (e.g.) in Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973/London: SCM, 1974), p. 153, paraphrasing von Rad.

then redeemed), even Genesis recognizes that the world does not cease to be God's ordered creation when humanity is in a state of rebellion and in need of redemption. The redemptive revelation presupposes an existent relationship of the world and humanity with the creator. Creation is not only the preparation for redemption but its permanent horizon; the total view of created reality expressed in Gen 1 - 2 continues to take precedence over the narrower concern with a particular redeemed people that follows.<sup>27</sup>

The creation-wide perspective of Gen 1 appears also in many Psalms, especially the hymns, which respond directly to the wonder of God's handiwork still perceptible in God's world, and call the whole cosmos to praise God. Like Genesis, the poetic books sometimes refer to creation as a historical event, but characteristically they stress God's ongoing activity in creation. To suggest that they think in terms of continuous creation would be anachronistic, but they emphasize that as well as giving life at the beginning, God ever gives life to the world and to humanity; as well as establishing order in the world at the beginning, in creative power God goes on maintaining the world's order and restrains forces that oppose it.<sup>28</sup> In the poetic books humanity is not just "lost" and the world is not just the sphere of Satan's activity. Humanity in the world is given life by God, each individual being formed as once Adam was (e.g., Ps 139:13-16), and humanity is in continuing dependence on God for the breath of life, as originally Adam was (Job 34:14-15). Before God as creator, sustainer, and savior, humanity is invited to enjoy life fully, to live it responsibly, to master it actively, to understand it intelligently.<sup>29</sup>

An understanding of God, humanity, and the world that comes from creation, reason, and human experience to human beings as human beings will not be confined to the particular people on whom the salvation-history focuses. It is based on principles common to humanity at large. There is therefore a theological rationale for its manifesting parallels to and being overtly open to the thought of other peoples (e.g., Prov 22:17-23:11; 30:1, 31:1; Job). It encourages us to be open to what there is to learn from all of human endeavor and insight, without abandoning the conviction that there is something distinctive about the biblical tradition.

Conversely, God's creation relationship with human beings as human beings implies a concern about all human beings; this concern is not limited to people within the stream of salvation-history. "By me kings reign," says the Wisdom inherent in creation (Prov 8:15-16), drawing attention to God's universal revelation of how to live successfully, while Gen 1 - 11 indicates that "the so-called salvation-history can... never be seen apart from the universal acting of God."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, God's concern is not only with humanity but with the whole cosmos in its own right, with which Genesis begins and

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Rolf P. Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," *HBT* 3 (1981): 59-123 (pp. 82-89 and 122 n. 60).

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Hermisson's comments in "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," pp. 48-51, on Pss 84; 93 104.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Roland E. Murphy's comments on the stimulus here toward "theological anthropology" ("The Interpretation of Old Testament Wisdom Literature," *Interpretation* 23 [1969]: 289-301 [p. 292]).

<sup>30</sup> Claus Westermann, "Creation and History in the Old Testament," in Vilmos Vajta (ed.), *The Gospel and Human Destiny* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971), pp. 11-38 (p. 17).



to which God directs Job to warn him against thinking that the universe revolves around him.

Humanity's life as God's creatures has its ethical norms, and creation morality is similar in content to the covenant expectations emphasized by salvation-history, and just as authoritative as these.<sup>31</sup> Its basis, framework, and motivation, however, lie elsewhere, in the ordered nature of the world, human beings' assumed inherent moral awareness, their experience of life, and their reasoning about it.

Convictions about the ordered nature of the world and life suggest a confidence in the world's trustworthiness that in the First Testament reflects a confidence in God—or, as the First Testament itself more often puts it, a reverence for God, and more specifically a reverence for Yahweh (for instance, rather than Baal. It also suggests a mutuality between experiences of the world and experiences of God.<sup>32</sup> Among the poetic books the Psalms, of course, take an overtly religious approach to creation. This is inherent in their form; if people were not responding to creation in a theistic way, it would not be psalms that they wrote. The opposite is true about the form of the wisdom books and the Song of Songs, which are intrinsically experiential and rational, focused on humanity and on everyday life. These features are not felt to be in tension with a religious perspective. For Israel everyday did not mean secular or secularist, humanity-centered denoted a starting point but not necessarily a total perspective, experiential included experience of God, and rational did not mean rationalist; it included an intuitive aspect. It is doubtful whether the poetic books—even apart from Psalms—are less religious than the histories.

Indeed, it is the revelation of God that people receive from the created world; created things teach, declare, recount, make known (Job 12:7-9).<sup>33</sup> As well as speaking to God in praise, creation speaks to humanity in wisdom. It speaks in grace: it does not actually use that word, but it reveals the creator as the great giver, entrusting life with all its wondrous joys to humanity and not giving up on human beings despite their abusing that ongoing trust. "Creation is grace."<sup>34</sup> In creation God reaches out in grace to all people, and in living in an ordered, created universe humanity has the prior contact with God and God's ways upon which conversation about the possibility of redemption can build.

Not that there is any inevitability about wisdom's revelation reaching humanity; it needs a human teacher to speak for it. Indeed, "revelation" maybe a misleading category to apply to creation. First, the concept emphasizes divine initiative and human receptiveness, whereas learning from creation involves human initiative, even if one sees the task as that of opening oneself to the cosmic, moral, and social order, present in the world by God's creation. Discovering and living in accordance with the cosmic order are hard work; they are not simply given. They are a "response to God" in the form of a "striving after knowledge."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Berend Gemser, *Adhuc Loquitur* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), pp. 144-49.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, p. 62, also p. 194, cf. pp. 190-93, 307, 317-18.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, pp. 162-63, 301-3.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM/New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 54 (cf. Young, *Creator, Creation and Faith*, p. 90).

<sup>35</sup> Von Rad, *OT Theology*, 1:365.

Second, the concept of revelation suggests an extraordinary activity on God's part, an unveiling of what otherwise conceals itself, whereas the notion of learning from creation presupposes that there is a resource of insight permanently available in creation, not one that manifests itself only occasionally.

Third, "revelation" suggests the manifest and inescapable unveiling of something otherwise hidden, whereas the wisdom books suggest rather that reality is divided between matters of clear meaning (no revelation being required in order to see them) and matters of such deep mystery that they cannot be grasped (no revelation being given in order to grasp them). One may sense their mystery, but not enter into it. For Job, being confronted by this perspective is ultimately reassuring; Ecclesiastes, however, makes a vice out of the necessity that the mystery of meaning is beyond the grasp of human beings.

Part of what creation reveals, or of what creatures discover, is that God is active in the regular, interrelated features of the world, as well as the irregular, the "miraculous," the "acts of God" that "break natural laws." God is the God of the normal chain of cause and effect, involved in every historical event. Indeed, a belief in such a presence of God in the mysterious depths of reality as a whole (an understanding that holds together faith, reason, and experience) is the presupposition of faith in a divine activity in particular historical events. It is because the whole of history can be seen as the act of God that particular events can be seen as God's acts of special significance for humanity's salvation.<sup>36</sup> It is on the basis of being the creator that Yahweh can be expected to act in history (cf. 1 Sam 2:8; 2 Kgs 19:15-19), both to judge the people (1 Sam 12:17; the doxologies in Amos) and to save them (Josh 10:12-13; Isa 40:12-31).

In the New Testament, the creation revelation of God is treated directly by Paul in Rom 1:18-20), though his point is that the revelation fails to achieve its goal. The Paul of Acts appeals to what people can know as creatures (and to the limitations of that knowledge) to pave the way for his proclamation of Christ. Jesus' own treatment of this theme is less explicitly theological, but in the end more far-reaching. It is he who appeals to God's concern for the world as its creator, to the rain falling on the just and the unjust, to nature's embodiment of the ways of God and humanity (see especially the parables), assuming that those whose eyes are open to the world will also be open to God.<sup>37</sup>

## 5 The World God Created is a World that Needed to be Redeemed

As God's creatures, human beings have to accept certain limits.<sup>38</sup> They are not God, and part of their submission to God is to accept the limits God places upon them. The First Testament narrative expresses this in

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg's comments on von Rad in "Glaube und Wirklichkeit im Denken Gerhards von Rad," in Hans Walter Wolff and others, *Gerhard von Rad* (Munich: Kaiser, 1973), pp. 37-54, 57-58 (p. 51).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Charles E. Carlston, "Proverbs, Maxims, and the Historical Jesus," *JBL* 99 (1980):87-105 (p. 105).

<sup>38</sup> See von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, pp. 97-110.

terms of a prohibition of access to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a prohibition issued at the moment of creation.

Proverbs recognizes its limits by declaring that in principle a grasp of wisdom depends on a prior commitment to Yahweh (Prov 1:7), and then by acknowledging that we cannot by thinking, observation, and analysis solve all the questions and problem that our experience of life raises. There remains an element of ambiguity and unpredictability about life, before which the wise person can only acknowledge the hand of God, the "act of God" (e.g., Prov 16:1, 9). "The future is largely determined by our present decisions so we should act responsibly," but "in spite of our best planning there is an inscrutable mystery about our experience that we cannot master or manipulate."<sup>39</sup> The wise do seek to bring order to the manifold nature of human experience, but they also recognize the limitations of what they can achieve in this venture.<sup>40</sup> Trust in Yahweh or reverence for Yahweh replaces confidence in order; as long as limitations continue to be recognized and trust continues to be the wise person's stance, there is no need for the crisis brought about when dogma devoid of contact with experienced reality causes doubt or skepticism to replace trust in order. True wisdom involves an unfinished dialogue rather than the construction of a comprehensive system.<sup>41</sup>

The tension between the search for order and the acknowledgment of limits is heightened by Job and Ecclesiastes. Job's friends take their stand on the dogma of order, though they are not rationalists: their world "is surrounded by the insurmountable wall of the inexplicable."<sup>42</sup> Job himself agonizes for an overall perspective that can do justice to his experience, and Eliphaz accuses him of wanting to know too much (Job 15:8). But he early on acknowledges that God the creator can neither be resisted nor comprehended (Job 9:4-14) and returns to this theme near the end of the dialogues (Job 26:7-14); it is expounded in the wisdom poem (Job 28) and taken further by Yahweh in person in responding to Job (Job 38 - 39). Ecclesiastes, too, sets the question of a total understanding in the center of his work, and has to acknowledge more grudgingly that he cannot reach the tree; a human being cannot come to any deep comprehension of what God is doing (Eccles 3:10-11).<sup>43</sup> Ecclesiastes is thus the frontier-guard who leads wisdom back to an awareness of the limitations of her empirical approach—or is himself a danger signal on a dangerous road.<sup>44</sup> Whatever of the ways of God can be perceived in God's world, something beyond the witness of nature, reason, or everyday experience is needed if one is to perceive creation's deepest mystery or the creator's identity.<sup>45</sup>

The barring of access to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil suggests limitations that are behavioral as well as cognitive. Human beings

<sup>39</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *In Man We Trust* (Richmond: Knox, 1972), p. 60.

<sup>40</sup> Murphy repeatedly emphasizes this point: e.g., "The Interpretation of Old Testament Wisdom Literature," p. 294.

<sup>41</sup> E.g., von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, pp. 318-19.

<sup>42</sup> Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, p. 293.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. James L. Crenshaw, in Crenshaw (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (New York: Ktav, 1976), pp. 28-30.

<sup>44</sup> So, respectively, Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the OT Theology," p. 158; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, pp. 235, 315-16.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," pp. 91-92.

are not given total freedom. In Genesis, their power over the created world is given positive direction and also negatively hedged. There is a certain ambiguity about their position: they are sent into a world that they will have to tame, deprived of access to what looks like a potential key resource, and subject to the blandishment of at least one rather wily fellow-member of God's creation.

The negative aspect of life in God's world is alluded to in material such as the Psalms that focuses on the world as God's good creation. Psalm 104 contrasts with Gen 2 - 3 in portraying creation not as a quality of life now diminished or lost but as a present attribute of the natural world.<sup>46</sup> Yet even Ps 104 is aware of the dark side to the created world: the need for the waters to be restrained, hinting at the experienced threat of their bursting their bounds, the darkness of night itself, Leviathan albeit reduced to the Loch Ness Monster, the suffering and death that follow the mysterious turning away of Yahweh's face and the taking away of Yahweh's breath, the trembling of the earth despite its allegedly secure foundation, the presence in the world of moral evil yet unpunished (Ps 104:6-9, 20, 26, 29, 32-35). Psalm 93 affirms that Yahweh reigns and that the world stands immovably firm, yet does so in the context of acknowledging that the floods hurl themselves against Yahweh's order. Psalm 113 makes similar affirmations in the context of acknowledging the existence of the poor, the downtrodden, and the barren.

The dark side to life appears also in the background of the thanksgiving psalms, which look back on some experience of that dark side. Proverbs recognizes it when it acknowledges or presupposes the inequalities of life, and when it portrays us wooed not only by Ms Wisdom but by Ms Folly, so that the "organizing voice" of wisdom can be lost if it is not heeded, with catastrophic consequences.<sup>47</sup>

In Genesis, the negative aspect of life becomes more prominent in Gen 3. Humanity's response to hedges is to tear them down (cf. also Ezek 28). Human beings' need of redemption now arises not merely from the intrinsic limitations of their creatureliness, but from the added limitations of their waywardness, climaxing in personal death and cosmic destruction. Their inclination to use power in whatever godless way they like is now not merely possible but actual, in the story of Cain and Abel, in the violence that leads to the flood, and in the instincts expressed in building a tower that will reach heaven. A hedging of human power by God's words is therefore reinforced by God's chastisements.<sup>48</sup> The confidence about life in its Gen 1 - 2 aspect, which also predominates in the psalms of praise, Proverbs, and the Song of Songs, thus gives way to a more somber perspective in Gen 3 - 11.

There is, however, an ambiguity about Gen 3 - 11, the reverse of the ambiguity that appears in Gen 1 - 2. Life east of Eden is not a reversion to total disorder. When human beings overstep their limits, they are not thereby deprived of God's effective blessing, nor indeed of God's saving acts. Even Cain in his deserved vulnerability is saved by the mark Yahweh puts on

<sup>46</sup> Odil Hannes Steck, *World and Environment* (Nashville: Abingdon/London: SCM, 1980), p. 79.

<sup>47</sup> See James L. Crenshaw, "In Search of Divine Presence," *Review and Expositor* 74 (1977): 353-69 (p. 366); cf. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, p. 161.

<sup>48</sup> George W. Coats, "The God of Death," *Interpretation* 29 (1975): 227-39 (pp. 233-34).

him. Even the profoundly violent humanity and the profoundly spoiled world is saved by the preserving of a human and animal remnant and the ebbing of a flood. After that event, furthermore, the permanent preservation and blessing of the world is promised and covenanted (Gen 8:15 – 9:17).<sup>49</sup> There is nothing wrong with the realm of creation in itself. The cosmos was created whole and secure and it remains so (Gen 1) even if humanity and history have put themselves out of joint in relation to it, and even if it becomes God's means of chastising humanity (Gen 3, Deut 28). It still serves God's will; it is not spoiled in itself. The world is established and cannot be moved (Ps 93:1). If the First Testament comes to promise a new creation it is because humanity's rebellion makes human beings experience the present cosmos as a locus of disorder, but it is thus history that is the real locus of disorder.<sup>50</sup>

The Gen 3 – 11 aspect of life is the focus of the psalms of lament, Job, and Ecclesiastes. In a lament, sometimes a renewed confidence about life in its Gen 1 – 2 aspect may appear, so that a lament becomes a psalm of trust or confidence; but alternatively, any residual such confidence may dissolve, so that the afflicted person's eyes focus exclusively on the experience of suffering, isolation, and abandonment, never to be raised again (so Ps 88). The entire books of Job and Ecclesiastes concern how one copes with the experiential and intellectual consequences of life east of Eden, where the creator's revelation seems invisible and the creator's grace obscured. Job (by including the friends' speeches and by ending the way it does) and Ecclesiastes (by including much proverbial material) acknowledge the truth in the more positive teaching of Proverbs—there is an ambiguity here, too—but they insist it is not absolutized, as if we could still live in Gen 1 – 2. When understanding faces the ultimate questions of reality, it may well feel that it encounters a "merciless darkness."<sup>51</sup>

The poetic books and the histories offer different strategies for coping with humanity's situation thus conceived. The poetic books explore the redemptive potential of the creation order itself. As creation is an ongoing activity of God and a present human experience, so is redemption. Salvation comes to humanity through "factors inherent in creation itself"; "creation theology has a soteriological character."<sup>52</sup>

The psalms of praise, Proverbs, and the Song of Songs still focus more on life in its Gen 1 – 2 aspect, the psalms of lament, Job, and Ecclesiastes more on life in its Gen 3 – 4 aspect, but both seek to overcome the limitations imposed in Gen 3 – 4, if not those of Gen 1 – 2. In Song of Songs 8:6-7 "love is represented as a force that is able to overcome the negative forces that threaten the very existence of world and mankind. Love gains the victory over chaos and creates wholesome order and life."<sup>53</sup> In this

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Claus Westermann, *Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress/London: SPCK, 1974), pp. 120-21.

<sup>50</sup> Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," pp. 80-81, 94-97, 119-20.

<sup>51</sup> Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," pp. 91-92, quoting von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, p. 159 (the published English translation there has "hopeless gloom").

<sup>52</sup> Hans Heinrich Schmid, "Schöpfung, Gerechtigkeit, und Heil," *ZTK* 70 (1973): 1-19 (p. 8); cf. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, p. 314.

<sup>53</sup> Nicolas J. Tromp, "Wisdom and the Canticle," in Maurice Gilbert (ed.), *La sagesse de l'Ancien Testament* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1979), pp. 88-95 (p. 94).

new paradise-garden with its fruit trees (Song 4:12-13) the tension of Gen 2 - 3's garden is gone. "No serpent bruises the heel of female or male"; love's lyrics are redeemed and redemptive.<sup>54</sup>

Once more, however, there is an ambiguity in the picture. Ecclesiastes, too, recreates the outer form of paradise garden with its fruit trees, but acknowledges that it has not recreated the inner reality (Eccles 2:5, 11). The Song of Songs is aware of the point: even here death, shame, separation, and domination are still realities of experience, and perhaps the rareness with which the positive note struck in the Song is heard in the First Testament (and is echoed in the Song's interpretation) reflects the need to see the topic in light of the limits of life east of Eden.<sup>55</sup>

A comparable recognition that creation theology's resources cannot solve all the problems it can perceive may be implied by the building of bridges with the histories' approach to creation and redemption. Psalm 19 and Job 28 suggest that the voice of God cannot be properly heard in creation and that the secret of the universe cannot be found; they go on to express the conviction that one may better understand the cosmos and God's involvement with it, if one understands Israel and God's involvement with them.<sup>56</sup>

Genesis also seeks to relate these two understandings, but from the opposite direction, setting Israel against the background of an understanding of the world. After its gloomy portrayal of the intrinsic limitations of human creatureliness and the added deprivations of human rebelliousness, it reaches a turning point when God takes hold of Abraham and his family and declares the intention to make him a model of blessing and thus a means of blessing to the world. The ambiguity between the two aspects of human existence, which it portrays as arising in history was—or has begun to be—solved in a particular sequence of events beginning with Abraham and Moses. This sequence of events offers a resolution of the twofold need suggested by Gen 1 - 11.

One need is of a revelation concerning the mystery of humanity's place in the world and the meaning of reality as a whole. The wisdom books recognize this mystery and do not expect to resolve it; the historians are confident that they can see the heart of its meaning.<sup>57</sup>

The other need is of a release from the bondage into which the human longing for freedom had taken humanity. So alienation from God is replaced by a covenant with God, family disruption (Gen 4; 9:20-27) by a family relationship with God, insecurity by a place to possess, violence and

<sup>54</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), chapter 5 and p. 156.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Francis Landy, "The Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden," *JBL* 98 (1979): 513-28 (p. 524).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, pp. 156-63. Von Rad also considers Prov 8 (where, however, it seems to me that a concern to relate creation wisdom and redemption revelation is less marked), and Sirach 24.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, pp. 292-94. Von Rad also suggests that, whereas wisdom teaching was in need of legitimation, for the histories legitimation was superfluous (pp. 291-92). Surely both wisdom and history found their legitimation in the same place, in the factuality of concrete experiences? It is such experiences, concrete historical events, that the histories actually relate; their legitimation is contained within them, in their factuality and meaningfulness.

oppression by liberation and a concern for justice. This begins to take place through the once-for-all historical events of the call of Abraham, the exodus, the meeting at Sinai, and the occupation of Canaan. Henceforth the power of creation is enjoyed only through the explicit celebration of the events of God's salvation for the people in their history. They cannot relate to and appropriate the power of creation "directly"; order is not allowed to triumph over liberation.<sup>58</sup>

The difference between the poetic books' approach to redemption and that of the histories should not be drawn too sharply. Psalm 19 and Job 28 build bridges between the two from one side. The stories of Saul, David, and Solomon do so from the other side, for they take the wisdom approach and challenge people to follow David's way and avoid Solomon's. Admittedly even they raise the question whether this call can be heeded, whether human beings inevitably fail to live up to the trust placed in them. Even David is, after all, an ideal type; the historical David betrayed trust and misused power.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the histories assume that it is the God of creation who redeems in history, it is the God who is lord of all history who exercises lordship in particular in Israel's history, redemption as well as creation is an embodiment of the creator's wisdom, and redemption history serves creation by taking steps toward its restoration.

The creation that history serves also becomes the instrument of history, as Yahweh uses creation (flood and storm, earthquake and plague) as a means of salvation and judgment. The events of Israel's history were of unique significance for the granting of insight into God's ways and for the achieving of humanity's redemption; these events were not merely one manifestation of the creative power that forms the world, but a universally important expression of it.<sup>60</sup> Thus the creation perspective of the poetic books provides the presuppositions for the redemption story, but the poetic books themselves are set in the context of a whole that is shaped by the salvation-history approach.

Such conclusions are confirmed by the New Testament, where wisdom appears in several contexts that are reminiscent of the First Testament. In the synoptic tradition Jesus proclaims a wisdom designed for life in the last days, its basis modified by the fact that the rule of God is at hand;<sup>61</sup> further, Q's collection of the wise teaching of Jesus is grounded in salvation-history by being incorporated in a Gospel. In John 1, the notion of the Logos takes up ideas and terms from the wisdom tradition as well as from Gen 1, but reconnects them with salvation-history in declaring that "the word became flesh." Romans asserts that the dis-order of sin and guilt is replaced because of the Christ event by the order of righteousness and forgiveness.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Coats, "The God of Death," p. 238; Walter Brueggemann, "Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel," *JBL* 98 (1979): 161-85 (pp. 172-174).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *In Man We Trust*, pp. 64-77, with Coats's comments, "The God of Death," p. 236.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Steck, *World and Environment*, pp. 125-26; Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," pp. 97-98.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Richard A. Edwards, *A Theology of Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), p. 78; Hartmut Gese, "Wisdom, Son of Man, and the Origins of Christology," *HBT* 3 (1981): 23-57 (pp. 40-45).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Schmid, "Schöpfung, Gerechtigkeit, und Heil," pp. 12-14.

First Corinthians both utilizes and attacks a concern with *gnosis*, as Isaiah both utilizes and opposes the wisdom approach, while Col 1 reflects the "foundational significance" of wisdom theology outside the area where First Testament influence was inevitable, and brings together creation and redemption, wisdom and cross.<sup>63</sup> Blessing becomes a motif expressing what God has done in Christ, fulfilling in him the promise made to Abraham (Gal 3:8-9, 14; cf. also Acts 3:25-26) and bestowing on us in him every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3). God's involvement in the regularities of life and God's acts of deliverance in Israel's history intersect in the life and achievement of Jesus.

In the context of reaffirmation of the significance of creation theology, one needs to note how central to the Bible is its stress on particular once-for-all events that are God's means of bringing salvation to the world. It does encourage us to learn from creation, from reason, and from experience, but its understanding of how salvation came goes beyond this, and if this understanding raises difficulties for us, it nevertheless remains part of the *skandalon* of its message that as such requires close attention.<sup>64</sup>

This is not, however, to resolve the creation-redemption polarity in favor of the latter, for this would be to miss the object of redemption itself.

## 6 Human Beings are Redeemed to Live Again their Created Life before God

The object of redemption is the restoration of creation. Human beings are redeemed so as to live again their created life before God.

Most people do not live at a moment when one of the great redemptive events occurs; they have to live their lives before God nevertheless. Even the generation that does live at such a moment has to make the transition from that experience to ongoing life. The climax of salvation-history is thus only the beginning of our history, and salvation-history's concern with once-for-all redemptive events achieved by God is its strength but also its limitation. The salvation-history tradition cannot stand on its own; the events it speaks of have to be grounded and applied, and their consequences for ordinary life worked out. We have to live historically in Pannenberg's sense, to live in light of those once-for-all past historical events that shape the possibilities of life in the present. We also have to live historically in Bultmann's sense, to make the decisions pressed upon us by our own historicity; and to live historically in Beardslee's sense, to live in time as the "little history" in accordance with the continuities of our existence from day to day and from year to year.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Gese, "Wisdom, Son of Man, and the Origins of Christology," pp. 47-50.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Oscar Cullmann's comments on Rudolf Bultmann in *Salvation in History* (London: SCM/New York: Harper, 1967), pp. 11-12, 19-28.

<sup>65</sup> William A. Beardslee, "The Wisdom Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *JAAR* 35 (1967): 231-40 (p. 240); cf. Rudolf Bultmann's own remarks, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1951/London: SCM, 1952) 1:25. Cf. also Bultmann's understanding of statements about God as creator as confessions of one's dependence on God (e.g., *Existence and Faith* [New York: Meridian, 1960/London: SCM, 1961], pp. 171-82 and 206-25); with Young's comment that the doctrine of creation thus refers to humanity's historicity, not the origin of the cosmos (*Creator, Creation and Faith*, p. 130).



In the First Testament itself, creation is not a mere subordinate preamble to history; history's purpose is to fulfill the purpose of creation. The First Testament is as concerned with the mythicizing of history (the elucidating of history's permanent significance for ordered life) as it is with the historicizing of myth, as concerned with the cyclization of history (salvation-history's fulfillment in the blessing of the ongoing agrarian life cycle) as it is with a turning away from cyclic to linear history.<sup>66</sup>

This is reflected in the structure of the Pentateuch itself. Exodus (the salvation event) has Genesis (creation and its blessing) behind it; it also has Deuteronomy (renewed blessing in living the created life) after it. The promise to Israel's ancestors is of blessing in the form of increase and of land; the object of the occupation of the land is then life in the land. The promises of God are fulfilled, the Day of Yahweh's blessing is here, Israel has entered into its inheritance and begun to enjoy Yahweh's rest, it has begun the life of love and rejoicing that can be its privilege to the end of the age. The manna, the bread of saving, is now replaced by the produce of Canaan, the bread of blessing (Josh 5:12), as the God of salvation-history becomes also the God of fertility.<sup>67</sup>

Deuteronomy holds together Yahweh's special acts of deliverance and Yahweh's involvement in the regularities of life in a variety of ways. It portrays Israel at the transition point from the one kind of experience to the other, celebrating their arrival in the settled, agrarian existence of their "rest" in the land of their secure possession, an existence embedded in "the structure of the cosmic space and its cyclic time," the life in the presence of the order of God's creation that was salvation-history's goal (cf. 26:1-11).<sup>68</sup> A life of blessing in this land thus becomes part of the covenant relationship with its focus on the historical relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The covenant relationship in turn makes blessing in the regularities of life dependent on obedience to Yahweh; failing that, Israel will experience God's curse and once again stand in need of Yahweh's act of deliverance.<sup>69</sup> The instruction that Yahweh gave in history is also an embodiment of wisdom that the nations will recognize (Deut 4:6).<sup>70</sup> Israel's regulations for worship introduce it to living in accordance with the orders of creation in the realm of time (especially annual festivals, months, and days), food, and sex; "Israel's arrival in this seasonal-cyclic life is celebrated as the fulfillment of Yahweh's salvation-history with Israel," and it now participates in the creation rest of God.<sup>71</sup>

Creation order is also implemented in the life of Yahweh's redeemed people in a practice of justice and steadfast love in society. Justice and steadfast love constitute the essence of Yahweh's moral character as the holy one (see Isa 5:16; Hos 11:9), and therefore the essential character of

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Schmid, "Schöpfung, Gerechtigkeit, und Heil," pp. 8-10; Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," p. 99.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church*, p. 30; *What Does the Old Testament Say about God?* p. 46; Gerhard von Rad, *Das Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1929, pp. 61-64.

<sup>68</sup> Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," p. 99.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church*, pp. 47-49.

<sup>70</sup> See Moshe Weinfeld's study of links between Deuteronomy and wisdom, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford/New York: OUP, 1972), pp. 244-319.

<sup>71</sup> Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," pp. 84, 103.

the created world as Yahweh purposes it to be (see Ps 33:4-5 leading into the treatment of creation and history that follows; also Pss 85:11-14 [10-13]; 89:10-15 [9-14]).<sup>72</sup> Salvation-history frees Israel to provide history with a paradigm of this creation order in its social life. If it does not (and often it does not), the creation order itself can be called to witness against it. It is the natural world that is the context of Israel's little history, blessing that is God's ongoing gift that brings it to its fulfillment, and wisdom that shows Israel the way to grasp that gift and to live the life of God's redeemed creatures in God's created world. The "worldliness" of the First Testament as a whole reflects its conviction that humanity's redemption by God releases us to live life in the world that God created, not out of it.

It is perhaps Israel's (brief) subsequent experience of ruling other peoples in the time of David and Solomon that leads it to ask questions about the cosmos as a whole and Yahweh's relationship to it. While Israel's significance, and the significance of salvation-history, can be more fully appreciated only in light of creation, by a feedback process creation is more fully appreciated only in light of Israel and of salvation-history.<sup>73</sup> This involvement with the nature of the whole creation connects also with an awareness that the fulfillment of creation's purpose involves not just Israel but the world. Even if traditio-historically the primeval history is secondary to salvation-history, and even if it is added to aid an understanding of Israel's significance, this does not establish that the object of the creation of the world is the existence of Israel rather than that the object of Israel's existence is to stand in service of God's creation of the world.<sup>74</sup> Salvation-history finds its context in creation theology and is the context for it.

Thus the creation approach of the poetic books is the presupposition for the histories; yet the poetic books belong within the life of the redeemed people. This is rarely explicit in the way they actually speak, except in some Psalms. Elsewhere it appears in the use of the divine name Yahweh, though that is not universal. But a wisdom literature is given a distinctive flavor by its own cultural stream, so that "every wisdom has its own history"; it is only people who know the Yahweh who became involved in Israel's history who experience and describe life and the world as Proverbs and Psalms do.<sup>75</sup>

Historically, of course, these books belong in the life of the redeemed people in that they were composed (or adopted) here. In the First Testament itself, they follow the salvation story; they do not precede it.<sup>76</sup> The Psalms, then, are the praises and prayers of the redeemed people of God, whether or not they refer to events such as the exodus; Proverbs teaches this people how to live before God the everyday life of redeemed creatures; the Song of Songs models for them what it means to love and be loved; Job pictures for them a human being coping with suffering; and

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," pp. 87-88, 96, 99-100, also Schmid's thesis in "Schöpfung, Gerechtigkeit, und Heil" that *sedeq* = Egyptian *ma'at* or "order."

<sup>73</sup> Steck, *World and Environment*, p. 125.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," p. 69.

<sup>75</sup> Hans Heinrich Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966), p. 198; cf. Steck, *World and Environment*, p. 178.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Roland E. Murphy, "Wisdom and Yahwism," in James W. Flanagan and Anita Weisbrod Robinson (ed.), *No Famine in the Land* (J. L. McKenzie Festschrift; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1976), pp. 117-26 (pp. 123-24).

Ecclesiastes reveals the believer wrestling with the doubt that can affect even those who have been on the receiving end of God's saving acts.

Further, salvation-history itself is only fully grasped in light of the approach of wisdom. To see Israel's histories as actually deposits of wisdom thinking may be an exaggeration, but these histories do emerge from an interaction between an awareness or conviction about certain once-for-all events and a set of assumptions or questions that are similar to those of wisdom. Wisdom is thus the means of analyzing, understanding, and testing salvation-history. It will refuse to let salvation-history keep its head in the clouds, and insist on clear thinking even in the area of faith's response to the "acts of God."

The New Testament is not as "worldly" as the First Testament, yet it too sees that people have to live their everyday life even when they have been redeemed. It portrays Jesus blessing children, blessing bread, and blessing those he leaves with a peace that will stay with them.<sup>77</sup> It develops the parenesis in Paul's letters (sometimes, as in Romans, manifestly the working out of salvation-history's implications for ongoing life). It preserves Q (albeit in its new narrative context), formulates the "new law" of Matthew, and accepts James as a "compendium of wisdom"<sup>78</sup> despite its lack of specific redemption content. It was natural, perhaps, for Luther, at a moment when the Pauline gospel came to life again, to inveigh against James, but life—Christian, redeemed, but created life—has to go on. The cross of Christ is God's wisdom; but Christ's concern with creation theology, as with law, is not to destroy but to fulfill it.<sup>79</sup>

## 7 The Redeemed Humanity Still Looks for a Final Act of Redemption/Re-creation

We have noted that created humanity needed some further act on God's part because of the limits placed on human understanding and because of the bondage imposed on human beings as a result of their rebellion against the creator. God's redemptive acts might be expected to deal with these two needs, but they do so only partially.

We find further reasons why we cannot foreclose discussion of the relationship between creation and redemption by simply declaring that salvation-history has solved the problem described by Gen 3 - 11. The ambiguity of human life remains after Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and David, and after Christ.<sup>80</sup> Gen 12 - Revelation is as ambiguous in its way as Gen 1 - 2 and 3 - 11 are in theirs. Something of the tension between Gen 1 - 2 and Gen 3 - 11, the psalms of praise and the psalms of lament, Proverbs/Song of Songs and Job/Ecclesiastes continues. The inherent limitations and pressures of the created order remain; the added bondages of the rebellious order are not wholly overcome. We live as children of two ages, of this age and of the age to come, or of this age and of the age that is lost.

Still living east of Eden, human beings continue to experience limits; sage (or philosophical theologian) is still unable to formulate satisfying

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church*, pp. 83-91.

<sup>78</sup> David A. Hubbard, "The Wisdom Movement and Israel's Covenant Faith," *TynB* 17 (1966): 3-34 (p. 23).

<sup>79</sup> Hermisson, "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," p. 55.

<sup>80</sup> Claus Westermann, *Beginning and End in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), p. 34.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Westermann, *What Does the Old Testament Say about God?* p. 55.

In the end, Israel had to give up mythologizing history. It seems to be a good means of bringing judgment, but an ineffective way of implementing creation order. Even Israel's own history does not offer the paradigmatic implementation of Yahweh's creation order on earth that it was meant to be, still less can it take the place of Yahweh's creation and sustaining of the world as a whole. Indeed, Israel's existence and form in history easily becomes an end in itself rather than the means of Yahweh's presence in the world, and when this happens, Yahweh has to be the one who imperils that very history in order to preserve an inverted form of witness to the priority of Yahweh's creation purpose. The aim in choosing Israel and becoming involved in its history, the aim of thereby taking steps toward the restoring of creation order in the lives of all nations) remains fulfilled except in this Pickwickian form.<sup>88</sup> History is then both the locus of Yahweh's activity and of Yahweh's hiddenness from Israel. History itself is not unequivocally revelatory, there is a plan of God being implemented in history (cf. Isa 8:9-10; 14:14-27), but it is a plan that cannot be perceived by human wisdom (cf. Isa 28:21; 29:14).<sup>89</sup>

As well as continuing divine mystery and continuing human sin, a third factor makes for dissatisfaction with the redeemed order: continuing worldly mortality. To compare humanity with grass that springs up in the morning but fades and withers by evening (Ps 90:7 [6]; cf. Isa 40:6) is explicitly gloomy about humanity but also implicitly gloomy about the world around us that mirrors this sad experience. Conversely, to contrast Yahweh's eternity with the perishable, aging, throwaway nature of Yahweh's creation (Ps 102:27 [26]) explicitly exalts Yahweh but implicitly downgrades it.

The story of God's involvement with the people in the First Testament (and in the New Testament) is thus one that comes to no final resolution; it continues to drive forward. It cannot merely be seen as a "study in crisis intervention" designed episodically to "re-establish a 'steady-state' universe"<sup>90</sup> (fullness of blessing in the created order). It must have its goal in some fuller realization of God's purpose than history has yet seen. Thus some in Israel came to look for a new world, more intelligible, more just, more lasting, more fulfilled than the present one. Gerhard von Rad begins his treatment of prophecy in his *Old Testament Theology* with the exilic Isaiah's exhortation, "Remember not the former things nor consider the things of old. For behold I purpose to do a new thing" (Isa 43:18-19). The words are at least open to referring back beyond Israel's history to the event of creation, and forward beyond Israel's history to a new creation (as they do in Isa 65:17).

Such hopes cluster in the book of Isaiah, though they do appear in other prophets and they take up aspects of poetic oracles and other promises of blessing in the Torah (e.g., Gen 12 - 13; 49; Exod 3; Num 22 -

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," pp. 61-62, 97, 100-101, 108-9, with his reference to von Rad, *OT Theology* 2:374-82, on the hiddenness of God.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Walther Zimmerli, "Wahrheit und Geschichte in der alttestamentliche Schriftprophetie," in *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977* (VTSup 29; Leiden: Brill, 1978), pp. 1-15 (pp. 7-9).

<sup>90</sup> Dale Patrick, *The Rendering of God in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), p. 101.

24; Deut 33).<sup>91</sup> No doubt they reflect the diversity of the book's origins, which is matched by their own diversity of portrayal; yet they surface in most of the various parts of the book, and give its whole a particular cast. Here Israel's royal ideal is explicitly projected onto the future Davidic ruler people hoped for, and the ideal keeps the notes of wisdom, peace, justice, and harmony in nature; nature will now contain no threat to humanity, and the whole world will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh (Isa 9:5-6 [6-7]; 11:1-9; cf. Jer 23:5-6). The "Isaiah apocalypse" portrays final judgment as an act of de-creation affecting both the inhabitants of the world and the powers of the heavens (Isa 24:1-23); it also portrays a scene of final blessing and feasting that includes the abolition of death itself (Isa 25:6-8), that first undoing of God's creation that Genesis sees as the result of humanity's first rebellion. The further picture of restoration in Isa 35 portrays a blossoming of nature that turns desert into joyful abundance, human disability into joyful strength and wholeness, and human danger, sin, and folly into joyful security, holiness, and freedom.

Isaiah 40 - 55 relates overtly to a specific historical context, and these chapters provide evidence for the view that a concern with creation serves a concern with history. Transformation of nature is a means of Yahweh's purpose being effected in history (Isa 40:3-4; 43:19-20) or a metaphor for it (Isa 41:17-20; 44:3-4) or a sign of it (Isa 55:12-13). This last, however, also implies that renewed experience of creation blessing (progeny, land, peace, justice, security) is the object of God's activity in history (cf. Isa 54:1-17).

In several ways, the final chapters of the book of Isaiah go beyond this. They, too, relate specifically to Israel; even the existence of a new cosmic order serves its needs and is part of the transformation of historical experience that it will enjoy (Isa 60:19-20). The new creation is embodied in the new Jerusalem (Isa 65:17-25). The security of that new heavens and new earth is also the security of Yahweh's people (Isa 66:22). At the same time, however, the new life that is here promised is the new life of a new *creation*; the best that can be promised to Yahweh's people is that they will enjoy long life and security, live in the homes they build, work and eat the fruit of their labor (Isa 65:17-25). Paradise is regained. In this sense what the book of Isaiah finally envisages is a restoration of creation order and a reintegration of human history into that order.<sup>92</sup>

In Christ all the promises of God find their yes (2 Cor 1:20). That assertion must include the promise of a new creation. What is true of all those promises is especially clear with this one, that this yes means not that in him they are all (yet) kept, but that in him they are all confirmed.<sup>93</sup> As the one in whom the whole creation holds together and in whom God's wisdom is embodied, and as the resurrected one, he brings new creation now to those who belong to God (2 Cor 5:17); he also guarantees that there will be a new heavens and a new earth (cf. especially Revelation). The Gospel of John begins as the First Testament begins; the Revelation of John and thus

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church*, pp. 32-34.

<sup>92</sup> See further Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," pp. 104-8; Knierim also discusses the alternation between consummation of creation and new creation in Isaiah.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Wilhelm Vischer, *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ* (London: Lutterworth, 1949) 1:24, referring to Karl Barth, "Verheissung, Zeit-Erfüllung," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 23.12.1930.

the New Testament itself ends as the First Testament (in its Greek/English shaping) ends.

In his study of *Creator, Creation and Faith*, Norman Young considers four theological approaches to his theme: the ontological (Tillich), the transcendentalist (Barth), the existentialist (Bultmann), and the eschatological (Moltmann).<sup>94</sup> The categorization is similar to the four approaches to creation and redemption that we have been considering, though coincidentally so (I did not discover Young's book until after drafting this chapter). The sharpest contrast, once one considers the content of the theologians' work that Young studies, appears in his chapter on Moltmann, for here the prospect of a new creation becomes centrally a stimulus to Christian action "designed to overcome the gap between what God has promised and what remains to be fulfilled."<sup>95</sup> There are hints of such an understanding in the New Testament (notably in 2 Pet 3). Generally, however, the point of creation language is precisely to emphasize the transcendent origin of what God has done, is doing, or will do. The praxis Moltmann desires may be right, but its ideology lies elsewhere.

The biblical material on creation and redemption invites the reader to a highly paradoxical perspective. Each of the four facets of the mutual relationship of these two poles is in tension not only in itself but also with the other facets. The temptation is to opt for one rather than another.<sup>96</sup> The challenge of First Testament theology is to hold them together as the varied facets of the dialectic or complementarity or counterpoint suggested by the First Testament's treatment of God's involvement in the regularities of our lives and God's acts of deliverance in history, so that the whole can be fruitful for our own faith and living.

---

<sup>94</sup> Young actually deals with Barth first.

<sup>95</sup> Young, *Creator, Creation and Faith*, p. 154; see, e.g., Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM/New York: Harper, 1967), pp. 19-22, 329-38. The theology of liberation takes a related approach to creation theology more generally: see, e.g., Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, pp. 155-60.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," p. 107, on P and Isa 56 - 66.